

Assigned for all purposes to: Stanley Mosk Courthouse, Judicial Officer: Richard Rico

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**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES – CENTRAL DISTRICT**

CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC.,  
in the public interest,

Plaintiff,

v.

THE KROGER CO., an Ohio Corporation;  
THE KROGER CO. OF MICHIGAN, a  
Michigan Corporation;  
FOODS CO., a business entity form unknown;  
and DOES 1-10,

Defendants.

CASE NO.

COMPLAINT FOR PENALTY AND  
INJUNCTION

Violation of Proposition 65, the Safe  
Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement  
Act of 1986 (*Health & Safety Code*, §  
25249.5, *et seq.*)

ACTION IS AN UNLIMITED CIVIL  
CASE (exceeds \$25,000)

Plaintiff CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC. alleges a cause of action against  
defendants THE KROGER CO., THE KROGER CO. OF MICHIGAN, FOODS CO., and DOES  
1-10 as follows:

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**THE PARTIES**

1. Plaintiff CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC. (“Plaintiff” or “CAG”) is an organization qualified to do business in the State of California. CAG is a person within the meaning of Health and Safety Code section 25249.11, subdivision (a). CAG, acting as a private attorney general, brings this action in the public interest as defined under Health and Safety Code section 25249.7, subdivision (d).
2. Defendant THE KROGER CO. (“KROGER”) is an Ohio corporation, qualified to do business in Ohio, and doing business in the State of California at all relevant times herein.
3. Defendant THE KROGER CO. OF MICHIGAN (“KROGER MI”) is a Michigan corporation, qualified to do business in Michigan, and doing business in the State of California at all relevant times herein.
4. Defendant FOODS CO. (“FOODS”) is a business entity form unknown doing business in the State of California at all relevant times herein.
5. Plaintiff is presently unaware of the true names and capacities of defendants DOES 1-10, and therefore sues these defendants by such fictitious names. Plaintiff will amend this complaint to allege their true names and capacities when ascertained. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that each fictitiously named defendant is responsible in some manner for the occurrences herein alleged and the damages caused thereby.
6. At all times mentioned herein, the term “Defendants” includes KROGER, KROGER MI, FOODS, and DOES 1-10.
7. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and thereon alleges that each of the Defendants at all times mentioned herein have conducted business within the State of California.
8. Upon information and belief, at all times relevant to this action, each of the Defendants, including DOES 1-10, was an agent, servant, or employee of each of the other Defendants. In conducting the activities alleged in this Complaint, each of the

1 Defendants was acting within the course and scope of this agency, service, or  
2 employment, and was acting with the consent, permission, and authorization of each of  
3 the other Defendants. All actions of each of the Defendants alleged in this Complaint  
4 were ratified and approved by every other Defendant or their officers or managing agents.  
5 Alternatively, each of the Defendants aided, conspired with and/or facilitated the alleged  
6 wrongful conduct of each of the other Defendants.

- 7 9. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that at all relevant times, each of the  
8 Defendants was a person doing business within the meaning of Health and Safety Code  
9 section 25249.11, subdivision (b), and that each of the Defendants had ten (10) or more  
10 employees at all relevant times.

11 **JURISDICTION**

- 12 10. The Court has jurisdiction over this lawsuit pursuant to California Constitution Article  
13 VI, Section 10, which grants the Superior Court original jurisdiction in all causes except  
14 those given by statute to other trial courts. This Court has jurisdiction over this action  
15 pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 25249.7, which allows enforcement of  
16 violations of Proposition 65 in any Court of competent jurisdiction.

- 17 11. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendants named herein because Defendants either  
18 reside or are located in this State or are foreign corporations authorized to do business in  
19 California, are registered with the California Secretary of State, or who do sufficient  
20 business in California, have sufficient minimum contacts with California, or otherwise  
21 intentionally avail themselves of the markets within California through their manufacture,  
22 distribution, promotion, marketing, or sale of their products within California to render  
23 the exercise of jurisdiction by the California courts permissible under traditional notions  
24 of fair play and substantial justice.

- 25 12. Venue is proper in the County of Los Angeles because one or more of the instances of  
26 wrongful conduct occurred, and continues to occur, in the County of Los Angeles and/or  
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1 because Defendants conducted, and continue to conduct, business in the County of Los  
2 Angeles with respect to the consumer product that is the subject of this action.

3 **BACKGROUND AND PRELIMINARY FACTS**

4 13. In 1986, California voters approved an initiative to address growing concerns about  
5 exposure to toxic chemicals and declared their right “[t]o be informed about exposures to  
6 chemicals that cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive harm.” Ballot Pamp.,  
7 Proposed Law, Gen. Elec. (Nov. 4, 1986) at p. 3. The initiative, The Safe Drinking  
8 Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, codified at Health and Safety Code sections  
9 25249.5, *et seq.* (“Proposition 65”), helps to protect California’s drinking water sources  
10 from contamination, to allow consumers to make informed choices about the products  
11 they buy, and to enable persons to protect themselves from toxic chemicals as they see  
12 fit.

13 14. Proposition 65 requires the Governor of California to publish a list of chemicals known to  
14 the state to cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive harm. *Health & Safety Code*  
15 § 25249.8. The list, which the Governor updates at least once a year, contains over 700  
16 chemicals and chemical families. Proposition 65 imposes warning requirements and  
17 other controls that apply to Proposition 65-listed chemicals.

18 15. All businesses with ten (10) or more employees that operate or sell products in California  
19 must comply with Proposition 65. Under Proposition 65, businesses are: (1) prohibited  
20 from knowingly discharging Proposition 65-listed chemicals into sources of drinking  
21 water (*Health & Safety Code* § 25249.5), and (2) required to provide “clear and  
22 reasonable” warnings before exposing a person, knowingly and intentionally, to a  
23 Proposition 65-listed chemical (*Health & Safety Code* § 25249.6).

24 16. Proposition 65 provides that any person “violating or threatening to violate” the statute  
25 may be enjoined in any court of competent jurisdiction. *Health & Safety Code* § 25249.7.  
26 “Threaten to violate” means “to create a condition in which there is a substantial  
27 probability that a violation will occur.” *Health & Safety Code* § 25249.11(e).

Defendants are also liable for civil penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day per violation, recoverable in a civil action. *Health & Safety Code* § 25249.7(b).

17. Plaintiff identified certain practices of manufacturers and distributors of exposing, knowingly and intentionally, persons in California to the Proposition 65-listed chemicals to products without first providing clear and reasonable warnings of such to the exposed persons prior to the time of exposure. Plaintiff later discerned that Defendants engaged in such practice.

18. On October 1, 1987, the Governor of California added Cadmium and Cadmium Compounds (“Cadmium”) to the list of chemicals known to the State to cause cancer (*Cal. Code Regs.* tit. 27, § 27001(b)). Pursuant to Health and Safety Code sections 25249.9 and 25249.10, twenty (20) months after addition of Cadmium to the list of chemicals known to the State to cause cancer, Cadmium became fully subject to Proposition 65 warning requirements and discharge prohibitions.

19. On May 1, 1997, the Governor of California added Cadmium to the list of chemicals known to the State to cause male reproductive and developmental toxicity (*Cal. Code Regs.* tit. 27, § 27001(c)). Pursuant to Health and Safety Code sections 25249.9 and 25249.10, twenty (20) months after addition of Cadmium to the list of chemicals known to the State to cause male reproductive and developmental toxicity, Cadmium became fully subject to Proposition 65 warning requirements and discharge prohibitions.

#### **SATISFACTION OF PRIOR NOTICE**

20. On or about August 17, 2018, Plaintiff gave notice of alleged violations of Health and Safety Code section 25249.6, concerning consumer products exposures, subject to a private action to KROGER, KROGER MI, FOODS, and to the California Attorney General, County District Attorneys, and City Attorneys for each city containing a population of at least 750,000 people in whose jurisdictions the violations allegedly occurred, concerning the product Roasted Seaweed.

1 21. Before sending the notices of alleged violation, Plaintiff investigated the consumer  
2 products involved, the likelihood that such products would cause users to suffer  
3 significant exposures to Cadmium, and the corporate structure of each of the Defendants.

4 22. Plaintiff's notice of alleged violation included a Certificate of Merit executed by the  
5 attorney for the noticing party, CAG. The Certificate of Merit stated that the attorney for  
6 Plaintiff who executed the certificate had consulted with at least one person with relevant  
7 and appropriate expertise who reviewed data regarding the exposures to Cadmium, the  
8 subject Proposition 65-listed chemical of this action. Based on that information, the  
9 attorney for Plaintiff who executed the Certificate of Merit believed there was a  
10 reasonable and meritorious case for this private action. The attorney for Plaintiff attached  
11 to the Certificate of Merit served on the Attorney General the confidential factual  
12 information sufficient to establish the basis of the Certificate of Merit.

13 23. Plaintiff's notices of alleged violations also included a Certificate of Service and a  
14 document entitled "The Safe Drinking Water & Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986  
15 (Proposition 65) A Summary." *Health & Safety Code* § 25249.7(d).

16 24. Plaintiff is commencing this action more than sixty (60) days from the dates that Plaintiff  
17 gave notices of the alleged violations to KROGER, KROGER MI, FOODS, and the  
18 public prosecutors referenced in Paragraph 20.

19 25. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that neither the Attorney General, nor  
20 any applicable district attorney or city attorney has commenced and is diligently  
21 prosecuting an action against the Defendants.

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1 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

2 **(By CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC. and against KROGER, KROGER**  
3 **MI, FOODS, and DOES 1-10 for Violations of Proposition 65, The Safe Drinking**  
4 **Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986 (*Health & Safety Code*, §§ 25249.5, *et***  
5 ***seq.*))**

6 **Seaweed Products**

7 26. Plaintiff CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC. repeats and incorporates by  
8 reference paragraphs 1 through 25 of this complaint as though fully set forth herein.

9 27. Each of the Defendants is, and at all times mentioned herein was, a manufacturer,  
10 distributor, promoter, or retailer of Roasted Seaweed, including, but not limited to,  
11 “SIMPLE TRUTH ORGANIC;” “ROASTED SEAWEED SNACK WITH SEA SALT;”  
12 “LOW IN CALORIES;” “RICH IN VITAMIN C;” “DISTRIBUTED BY THE KROGER  
13 CO.,” “PRODUCT OF SOUTH KOREA;” “0 11110 79022 4” (“Seaweed”).

14 28. Seaweed contains Cadmium.

15 29. Defendants knew or should have known that Cadmium has been identified by the State of  
16 California as a chemical known to cause cancer, developmental toxicity, and reproductive  
17 toxicity and therefore was subject to Proposition 65 warning requirements. Defendants  
18 were also informed of the presence of Cadmium in Seaweed within Plaintiff's notice of  
19 alleged violations further discussed above at Paragraph 20.

20 30. Plaintiff's allegations regarding Seaweed concerns “[c]onsumer products exposure[s],”  
21 which “is an exposure that results from a person's acquisition, purchase, storage,  
22 consumption, or other reasonably foreseeable use of a consumer good, or any exposure  
23 that results from receiving a consumer service.” *Cal. Code Regs.* tit. 27, § 25602(b).  
24 Seaweed is a consumer product, and, as mentioned herein, exposures to Cadmium took  
25 place as a result of such normal and foreseeable consumption and use.

26 31. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that between August 17, 2015 and the  
27 present, each of the Defendants knowingly and intentionally exposed California  
28 consumers and users of Seaweed, which Defendants manufactured, distributed, or sold as  
mentioned above, to Cadmium, without first providing any type of clear and reasonable

1 warning of such to the exposed persons before the time of exposure. Defendants have  
2 distributed and sold Seaweed in California. Defendants know and intend that California  
3 consumers will use and consume Seaweed, thereby exposing them to Cadmium.

4 Defendants thereby violated Proposition 65.

5 32. The principal routes of exposure are through dermal contact, inhalation, and ingestion,  
6 including hand to mouth pathways, inhalation, and trans-dermal absorption. Persons  
7 sustain exposures by eating, consuming, mixing, and handling the Seaweed without  
8 wearing gloves or any other personal protective equipment, or by touching bare skin or  
9 mucous membranes after handling the Seaweed as well as through direct and indirect  
10 hand to mouth contact, hand to mucous membrane, or breathing in particulate matter  
11 dispersed from the Seaweed.

12 33. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that each of Defendants' violations of  
13 Proposition 65 as to Seaweed have been ongoing and continuous, as Defendants engaged  
14 and continue to engage in conduct which violates Health and Safety Code section  
15 25249.6, including the manufacture, distribution, promotion, and sale of Seaweed, so that  
16 a separate and distinct violation of Proposition 65 occurred each and every time a person  
17 was exposed to Cadmium by Seaweed as mentioned herein.

18 34. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that each violation of Proposition 65  
19 mentioned herein is ever continuing. Plaintiff further alleges and believes that the  
20 violations alleged herein will continue to occur into the future.

21 35. Based on the allegations herein, Defendants are liable for civil penalties of up to  
22 \$2,500.00 per day per individual exposure to Cadmium from Seaweed, pursuant to  
23 Health and Safety Code section 25249.7(b).

24 36. Plaintiff has engaged in good faith efforts to resolve the claims alleged herein prior to  
25 filing this Complaint.

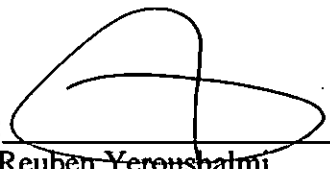
26 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

27 Plaintiff demands against each of the Defendants as follows:  
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1. A permanent injunction mandating Proposition 65-compliant warnings;
2. Penalties pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 25249.7, subdivision (b);
3. Costs of suit;
4. Reasonable attorney fees and costs; and
5. Any further relief that the court may deem just and equitable.

Dated: July 18, 2019

YEROUSHALMI & YEROUSHALMI

BY:   
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Consumer Advocacy Group, Inc.